

STORY BOOKS

BY ALICE

THE  
BROTHER'S  
RETURN  
and  
Other Stories

BY T. NELSON & SONS



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brother's return and other stories**

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**SARAH MAY'S KINDNESS REMEMBERED.**

***THE***  
***BROTHER'S RETURN***  
***AND OTHER STORIES.***

BY

*A. L. O. E.,*

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**CONTENTS.**

THE BROTHER'S RETURN

BLACK YARN AND BLUE

THE SHEPHERD'S DOG

WHAT BIRD WOULD YOU BE?

THE HERO AND THE HEROINE

BEWARE OF THE WOLF

## *THE BROTHER'S RETURN*

*AND OTHER STORIES.*

### ***The Brother's Return.***

"I COULD have been sure that John's house stood here," murmured Ralph Daines to himself as he looked around. "I know that it stood by the turn of a road, just as one came in sight of the church, and that it had a clump of trees in front, just like these before me. Ah! Well, well," he added, "it's more than twenty years since I turned away from my brother's door—turned away in anger—and twenty years will bring changes. Perhaps I've mistaken the place, after

all. I stayed but a short time with John, so that I never knew his home well. In twenty years, one may forget; yes, one may forget a spot, but there are some things which never can be forgotten, however long we may live."

And amongst those things which rested upon Ralph's mind was his quarrel with his brother, Long John—a quarrel so sharp, that, after the two had parted, they had never seen nor written to each other again. For twenty years and more, Ralph had dwelt in a distant land, and had never so much as sent a letter to inquire after the welfare of the brother whom he had left in England. But when Ralph at last returned to his native isle, his heart began to yearn towards the only near relation whom he had upon earth. His anger had been softened by time; and Ralph thought that his brother's home should be his home, and that, though they had parted in anger, they might yet meet again in affection.

Ralph Daines, after leaving his luggage at the inn nearest to the place where his brother had dwelt, set out on foot for the house, being sure that he knew the road well enough to enable him to find it without much trouble. But the traveller was perplexed, when he came near the spot where he thought that the house should be, to see only waste land overgrown with thistles and charlock, with bits of a tumble-down fence which could not keep out some sheep that were grazing where once a garden had been.

"Perhaps I've taken the wrong road, after all; perhaps I should have turned to the left after passing the mile-stone," mused Ralph. "I wish now that I had inquired the way at the inn, but I thought that I could not miss it. However, it matters little, for here comes a child tripping along the path over yon meadow. She perhaps may be able to tell me the way to the house of John Daines."



Ralph leaned over the rough paling which bordered the meadow, and waited till the little girl whom he saw carrying a bundle of fagots should come up to the place where he stood. The child looked poor, but her dress was neat, and her cheeks were as rosy as the flowers which she had stuck in her bosom.

"I say, my little friend," began Ralph, as soon as the child could hear him, "is there not a lonely house near this place, with red tiles and a porch, and a poultry-yard behind it?"

"I dun no, sir," said the child.

"Was there not once such a house on the plot of waste land behind me?"

"I dun no," repeated the child, who was scarcely four years old.

"I do not seem likely to get much information out of this little one," said Ralph to himself; "but she may know people, though she does not know places.—Does a Mr. Daines live near this spot?" he inquired.

The child looked doubtful for a minute, then muttered, "Dun no;" and seemed inclined to pass on.

"Wait a bit, little one," said Ralph. "You may perhaps have heard of Mr. Daines as 'Long John,' for he often went by that name!"

A gleam of intelligence broke at once over the rosy young face. "Eh! Yes; he be father!" she cried. "Nobody don't call him mister."

"Your father!" exclaimed Ralph in surprise; for the speech and dress of the little girl were those of a poor peasant child

—not such as might have been expected in one brought up in the comfortable house of his brother. "Do you mean to say that Long John Daines is your father?"

The child nodded her head.

"And where is he now?" cried Ralph.

The little girl raised her sunburnt arm and pointed towards the church which appeared at a little distance.

"Can you take me to the place, my little friend? I will help you over the stile, and carry your fagots for you, and you shall have a bright new shilling when we arrive at your home."

The eyes of the child brightened. She let the stranger lift her over the stile, and kiss her, and gaze in her face—saying that her eyes were just like her father's. She then tripped merrily along by his side, and in reply to Ralph's questions, told him that her name was Mary, and that sometimes she was called Polly. She did not know whether she had any other name, but she knew that she was Long John's little child, for all the folk knew that.

"Where is your mother?" asked Ralph. His brother had not been married when they had parted, twenty years back.

"Mother is with father," said Mary.

"And is that their home?" inquired Ralph, as he approached a pretty farmhouse which stood a little way back from the road.

"Oh no!" cried Mary, in surprise at the question. "Not a big home like that."

Ralph's face became graver and sadder, for the farmhouse was not so large as the dwelling in which he had last seen his brother. It was clear that Long John could not have prospered in life; and this made Ralph more deeply regret having so long harboured anger against him.

"Why had I the folly—the worse than folly—to keep up a quarrel with my own brother!" thought he. "Poor John has gone down in the world; I shall find him, perhaps, in distress. He has needed the help of a brother, and knew not where a letter would find me.—Has your father to work very hard?" he inquired.

"Oh no," replied the child again, with a look of surprise.

The mind of Ralph was relieved. "Then he is never very hungry?" said he.

"Never hungry," answered Mary gravely.

"It is a comfort that John has not known actual want," thought Ralph. "If I find him—as I expect—a poor man, I, with plenty of money in my pocket, shall be able to start him again in business."

Ralph walked for some time in silence by his little companion, for his thoughts were full of the days of old. He remembered how he had romped and played with his brother when they had been children together; and he remembered, alas! How often their sports had ended in quarrelling and fighting. Both were proud, passionate boys; neither liked to give in; neither could bear to ask pardon of the brother whom he had wronged. The last sad quarrel between Ralph and his brother had followed on a thousand lesser ones, which had embittered the lives of both.

"Ah, how often our poor mother urged us to love one another!" thought Ralph, now a worn elderly man, as he recalled the days of his youth. "How she spoke to us of the meekness and gentleness which should be shown by every Christian, and taught us that he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city! What grief it would have given to our mother could she have known that, after her death, her sons would be more than twenty years without seeing or hearing tidings of each other! But now I will make amends for the past. Poor John shall find that for him and his family I have an open purse and an open heart. I hope that the quarrel which has kept us so long asunder may be the last which shall ever arise between me and my only brother."

Ralph was so much engaged with thoughts such as these, that he scarcely noticed that his little guide was now taking him through the village churchyard, until she suddenly stopped quite still, which made her companion stop also. Mary pointed to a mound of turf, over which the long grass was growing. There was a low head-stone by the mound, with a short inscription upon it. Ralph started and trembled when his glance fell on that stone. It bore two names: the first that of MARY DAINES, who had died, aged twenty; the next that of her husband, JOHN DAINES, who (as the date showed) had died not a year before his brother's return. Little Mary was too young to spell out the words on the stone; but she had been taught to look on that grassy mound as the home of her father and mother.

Great was the surprise of the child to see the burst of grief to which her quiet, grave companion gave way. The little one knew not how great had been her own loss; her childish tears for her father had long since been dried; to her, there was no deep sadness in the peaceful churchyard, or the grassy mound on which daisies grew. Mary wondered why

the tall stranger should fall on his knees by the mound, and bury his face in his hands, and sob as if he were a child. Mary knew not what a bitter thing it is to repent too late of unkindness shown to a brother; to wish—but to wish in vain—to recall words which should never have been spoken, deeds which should never have been done.

Ralph would at that moment have given all that he possessed upon earth to have been able to say to himself, "There was never anything but kindness and love between me and him whom I shall see no more upon earth!"

At length, Ralph arose from the grave, with a heavy heart, and eyes swollen with weeping. He took Mary up in his arms, pressed her close to his heart, then covered her face with kisses. He was thankful that there was yet one way left by which he could show affection to his lost brother; he would act the part of a father to John's little orphan girl. Ralph promised by his brother's tomb that he would watch over Mary, and care for her and love her, as if she were his own child.

And well did Ralph keep that promise,—well did he supply a parent's place to Mary. Not only did he feed and clothe her, and give her a happy home, but he earnestly tried to bring her up as a Christian child. He taught his little niece to give and forgive, to bear and forbear, and never to lie down at night to sleep before she had asked forgiveness of any one whom she had offended during the day.

"Oh, my child!" Ralph would say with a sigh to Mary, whenever she showed any sign of a proud or passionate temper, "never let anger have time to grow, for its fruit is sin and bitter sorrow. Pray for grace that you may be able to keep the blessed command, 'Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put

away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."

### ***Black Yarn and Blue.***

SOFTLY outside Mary's cottage fell the rain, the gentle April rain; and round and round went the wheel within the cottage, where Mary sat at her spinning. Never did her husband wear a pair of socks that was not of Mary's spinning and knitting. The hum of the cottager's busy wheel was a pleasant sound; and cheerful and bright looked Mary's face as she busily spun her blue yarn.

But the face of her son Jemmy was neither cheerful nor bright, as he sat, with his crutches beside him, in front of the fire, with his back turned towards his mother. First Jemmy yawned, then yawned again, and then he took to sighing; and his sigh had so dreary a sound, that it drew the attention of Mary.

"What are you thinking of, Jemmy, my lad?" asked the mother, stopping the wheel for a minute.

"I am thinking of all my troubles," was the mournful reply, uttered slowly, and in a tone most plaintive.

"Well, the accident to your leg was a great trouble; but the poor leg is getting better,—the doctor says that you will

soon throw your crutches away," observed Mary cheerfully; and round again went her wheel.

"I was not thinking of great troubles, but of little troubles," said Jemmy; "this has been an unlucky day. It rains when I want to go out."

"Oh! The blessed rain, which will do the country such good!" interrupted his mother.

"And I've lost my silver penny," continued Jemmy. "I cannot find it, though I've hunted in every nook and cranny."

"Certainly that is no great trouble," laughed Mary. "Wait till I've spun this yarn, and I'll help you to look for your silver penny. And what is your next trouble, my boy?"

"That pretty plant which the gardener gave me is dying; it is curling up all its leaves," sighed doleful Jemmy, glancing towards a flowerpot which stood on the sill.

"I daresay that it only wants a little water," said Mary. "See how the spring shower is making the fields and hedges green! Your poor prisoner in the flowerpot has not had a drop to drink since yesterday, when you brought it home. Have you any more troubles, my boy?" The question was so playfully asked, that Jemmy felt rather ashamed of his sighing and grumbling.

"Only that Tom is unkind; he is always teasing me to come out and fly the kite with him, when he knows that I have a lame leg. He said, when he went out this morning, that my coddling at home was all nonsense; that he'll make a bonfire of my crutches some day, and that I never shall miss them! It was very, very unkind."

"Tom is a little too fond of joking; but I really don't see anything in that joke to set you sighing," said Mary, laughing. "My dear boy, you are much too ready to set that brain of yours spinning gloomy thoughts. Suppose that I were to put black wool upon my wheel, what should I spin but black yarn, and your father would have nought but black stockings to wear. Why should one choose a dark colour, when it costs nothing to have a cheerful one? So with the yarn of thought. Take something pleasant to think of, something bright to turn round and round in your mind. Suppose now that, instead of your troubles, big or little, you take to counting up all the kindnesses which you have received since yesterday morning."

Jemmy had shifted his position, so that he was now sitting looking at his mother; and a sight of her cheerful face was in itself enough to brighten him up a little. Still, it was rather in a grumbling manner that he replied, "I don't know what kindnesses I have to count up. No one is ever kind to me,—except, of course, you and my father."

"We count for something," cried Mary. "But think a little longer, my lad—turn your wheel round a little faster." And the spinner suited her action to her words.

"Well, Tom did mend my kite this morning; I suppose that you would call that kind," observed Jemmy.

"Now were you not needlessly spinning black yarn instead of blue, when you thought of Tom's rough joke instead of his real act of kindness?" asked Mary.

"And perhaps it was kind in the gardener to give me that plant; only it's dying now," said Jemmy.

"It was not dying when he gave it; I've seldom seen a prettier flower. Have you no other kind deeds to



remember?" asked his mother.

It was a new thing to Jemmy to count up kindnesses instead of troubles, and he rubbed his forehead, as if rather perplexed.

"My grandfather gave me a shilling yesterday," he said at last, "and that was a kindness."

"And you chose to think more of the penny lost than of the shilling received! How fond some people are of choosing the black yarn!" cried Mary.

"There's no one else that has done anything kind to me; I can remember nothing more," said Jemmy, after a moment's reflection.

"I can remember something for you, then. Who taught you reading and spelling yesterday afternoon?"

"Oh, Sarah May," answered the boy. "But that is nothing new; she has done that ever since the hurt in my leg stopped my going to school."

"Yes, she has shown kindness to you every day for the last ten weeks, and therefore you have forgotten to think of it as kindness at all. O Jemmy, Jemmy. Here is a sad choosing of the black yarn instead of the blue!"

"Teaching me costs Sarah nothing," began Jemmy; but he stopped short, for he could not help feeling a little ashamed of such ungrateful words.

"That is an odd thing to say!" cried Mary. "Does not teaching cost Sarah trouble and time; and is it not for time and trouble that every workman and workwoman is paid, except those who, like Sarah, take to helping others from

kindness? I know that Sarah went in her old dress to church last Sunday, because she had not had time to make up her new one; I know that she has stopped at home to teach you, when she might have been enjoying a pleasant walk with her brother. I suppose that my lame kiddie thinks so little of all this kindness because Sarah is good and patient, and never grumbles at small troubles like somebody that I know."

Mary went on with her spinning faster than before, leaving Jemmy to turn over in his mind her little reproof. Perhaps the yarn of his thoughts was dark enough at first; for Jemmy was mortified to find what a silly, discontented, ungrateful boy he had been. He sat silent for several minutes, and then saying, "I had better water that plant," he rose from his seat, and went slowly up to the water-jug, which stood in a corner of the room.

As soon as Jemmy had lifted the jug, he uttered an exclamation of pleasure. "Oh, here is my silver penny!" he cried. "It has been lying all the time under the jug!"

And in the jug all the time had been lying the water which was all that was needed to make the delicate plant revive, stretch out again its curling leaves, and lift up its drooping blossoms. Jemmy felt pleasure in watering his flower; to do so, he thought, was almost like giving drink to a thirsty animal.

Jemmy was all the more pleased, because he had a little plan in his mind, which he carried out on the following day. When his mother had set him to count the kindnesses which he had received, she had taught him also to feel grateful for them.

But the little spinning-wheel of his brain did not rest there, nor stop till Jemmy had found out some way of showing that he was grateful. It was indeed but little that the lame boy could do; but when he carried to Sarah May a nosegay of all his best flowers, and saw her smile of pleasure as she received it, a joyful sense of having done what was kind and right filled the heart of the grateful boy. The yarn of Jemmy's thoughts then seemed to have become as clear and blue as the sky.

Dear reader, what thoughts is your little brain now spinning? When you gratefully remember kindnesses from earthly friends, blue and bright is the hue of your thoughts; but when you are also thankful for all the countless blessings bestowed by your Heavenly Friend, then the thread is all turned into gold!

### ***The Shepherd's Dog.***

"WELL, uncle, and if I did kick the little beast, what of that? He's only a dog, a mere shepherd's dog," said Steenie Steers, in a tone of contempt, as he looked down on the rough little creature that had crouched for protection beside the chair of his master, Farmer Macalpine.

"And what is a dog—a shepherd's dog—but a useful creature, a grateful creature, that might teach a lesson to many of a nobler race?" said the farmer tartly.

Macalpine had a face almost as sharp and eyes almost as keen as those of his four footed companion, and his shock of tawny hair was almost as thick and rough as the coat of his faithful Trusty. There was nothing smooth about Farmer Macalpine, as his spoiled nephew found to his cost whenever he and his uncle chanced to be together.

Steenie Steers thought himself a very fine fellow indeed; in this, as in many other things, he had formed a very different opinion from that of Farmer Macalpine. Though Steenie was not yet quite twelve years of age, he already put on all the airs of a grown-up fop. Macalpine had found the boy lolling in the only easy-chair in the room of his aunt, Miss Steers, with his silver-tipped cane in his hand; and Steenie had hardly risen to welcome his uncle, though he had not met him for more than a week.

"I've come to see your Aunt Elizabeth, Steenie; is she at home?" asked Macalpine.

"Aunt Bess—why, no; she's out somewhere," answered the nephew. "I dare say that she's trotted over to the doctor's," he added, in a tone of utter indifference.

"Is her head better? How did she sleep last night?" inquired the farmer.

"How can I tell? I've just come in from a stroll in the woods," replied Steenie.

"I suppose that you did not go on your stroll without your breakfast; you must have seen your aunt then," said Macalpine, in his rather snappish manner.

"I wasn't down to breakfast till old Aunt Bess had done hers, and gone out," answered Steenie. "I was up late last night at the Burnsides," added the boy, with a yawn.

"I've heard your aunt say half-a-dozen times that she did not like your going to those Burnsides," said the farmer.

Steenie laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not bound to care for all her likes or dislikes either," muttered the boy, tapping his front teeth with his silver-tipped cane.

Macalpine's sharp keen eyes looked sharper and keener than ever as he observed, "After your aunt's bringing you up, and doing everything for you these ten years, ever since you could toddle alone, I think that she has a good claim at least to your obedience, if you have no affection to give."

Apparently Master Steenie did not relish his uncle's remark, for, perhaps to turn the conversation, he began teasing the farmer's dog. Macalpine's angry remonstrance led to the reply of his nephew with which my little story begins.

"I wonder that you care to keep such a rough ugly cur as that Trusty," observed Steenie Steers.

"I keep him for some use," answered the farmer. "Trusty guards my flock attends to my call; by day or by night; in snow, rain, or hail, he is always ready to do my bidding. He's a good old fellow," continued Macalpine, stooping to pat his rugged friend, who licked the farmer's hand in return. "I've reared him from a puppy."

"I should not care to rear such a common kind of dog as that," observed Steenie, who prided himself on being a dog-fancier. "If he were a King Charles spaniel now—"

"Or a pug or a poodle," interrupted the farmer; "I should not consider him worth the rearing. I care for use, not for show."

"Your favourite does not cost you much, I'll be bound!" said Steenie Steers, with a saucy laugh.

"Trusty costs me nothing," answered Macalpine, "for he is content with a few bones, and fairly earns what he gets. But a friend of mine once reared a puppy that would, perhaps, be a puppy just to your taste. Plenty of care and pains she bestowed on the useless creature, and stuffed it with food more than enough. I consider that much of that good feeding was downright waste, seeing what the puppy was to turn out, and that my poor friend really stinted herself to pamper her pet."

"Did the creature devour so much, then?" inquired young Steers.

"Why, he must have gobbled up, during his training,—let me see—let me see," and Macalpine rubbed his shaggy head to help out his calculations,— "the pet must have gobbled up as good as three hundred big legs of mutton!"

"I say!" exclaimed Steenie, in much amazement. "Your friend's pet must have been no pup, but a lion, and one with a monstrous appetite, too! Such a brute as that would soon eat his mistress out of house and home."

"He did not eat all the mutton in a day—or a week—or a month; he took his time about it," said the farmer, with a low chuckling laugh. "But my friend's hungry pet did not live on mutton alone; we must add to the meat some three hundred pounds of fresh butter!"

"A dainty dog!" exclaimed Steenie.

"And not much less than a thousand loaves of white bread," said Macalpine "with tubs of milk, and casks of beer, and I

don't know how many plum-cakes, seed-cakes, iced cakes, and all sorts of sweeties besides!"

"You are cracking a joke on me, uncle," said Steenie. "I'll answer for it that your friend's pet was never a puppy at all."

"I could not answer for it that he is not one now, and a very useless puppy, and a very ungrateful puppy," cried the farmer, rising from his seat. "There, I see my sister coming," he added, as he looked through the open doorway; "Trusty, you and I will go and meet her."

Trusty, ever ready, sprang up and followed his master.

Steenie's face had grown exceedingly red at the words of Macalpine; the boy bit hard the silver tip of his cane. He could now see clearly enough what his uncle's meaning had been. Steenie himself was the idle, ungrateful puppy, that, after having been fed for ten long years on his kind aunt's bounty, had made no kind of return for all the care and love which she had lavished upon him.

I must say that Farmer Macalpine had a rude and disagreeable way of giving reproof; he did not, as all Christians ought to do, speak the truth in love. His manners and his words were as rough as his hair. We may have no such plain-spoken uncle to remind us of things which we do not care to remember, but it is well for all who have been brought up by parents or friends in comfortable homes, all who have been fed and clothed year after year by the kindness of others, to ask themselves what return they are making for all that they have received.

I fear that Steenie Steers is not the only boy who deserves the name of "a very useless puppy," and who might, if he would, learn a lesson from Trusty, the old shepherd's dog.

## ***What Bird Would You Be?***

"A NEW game for a rainy day!" cried Clara, clapping her hands to command silence amongst the merry little group of children who, tired of active romps, now clustered around her.

"It must be a quiet one, for the little ones are out of breath with Blindman's Buff, and Sophy, I see, is fanning herself on the sofa. Here, Tom and Felix, draw in chairs to form a circle; the two footstools will do nicely for Jessie and Minnie—little seats will suit little people. Tall Phil, you may perch on the music-stool, and look down on us all, if you like it."

The circle of children was soon formed, all waiting till Clara should tell them how to begin their new game.

Clara took a rich red rose from a vase which stood near. "I am going to ask a question," said she, "and to the one who shall offer the best reason for his or her answer, the rose shall be given as a prize."

Tom, a merry rosy-cheeked boy, laughed as he stooped and whispered to his next neighbour, Annie. "If the rose were to be won by giving a long jump, or a hard pull, or a good knockdown blow, I'd have a chance," said he; "but you could wring out butter from a broom-stick sooner than a rhyme or a reason from me."

"Let's hear the question," cried Phil.



"If you were to be changed into a bird, what bird would you choose to become?" asked Clara.

"An eagle," shouted out Master Tom.

"Your reason?" inquired the young lady.

"Well," drawled out the boy, "suppose because he is the biggest and strongest of birds, and able to whack all the rest."

"The eagle is neither the biggest nor the strongest of birds," cried Phil. "The ostrich, condor, and albatross are all larger, and some more powerful than the eagle."

Tom shrugged his shoulders and shook his head; had he not been fonder of boxing than of books, he might have said that the huge condor, being a vulture, is of the same order, and therefore may be called first cousin to the eagle.

"Jessie, dear, what would you be?" asked Clara of the smallest child in the room.

"I'd be a hummingbird," lisped Jessie, "'cause it's the prettiest of all 'ittle birds."

"Pretty, yes," observed Annie, her sister; "but I think that its prettiness is rather an evil to it than a good. If you were a hummingbird, Jessie, you would very likely be caught, killed, and stuffed for the sake of your beauty."

"And what says our little Minnie?" inquired Clara of a plump, fair, flaxen-haired child who sat on a footstool next to Jessie, with her arm round her young companion.

"I'd be a beauty swan, swimming about amongst the lilies, under the shady trees," said the child, who had admired the

swan and his mate, with their little cygnets, floating on the lake, as she had seen them that morning.

"Give us your reason," said Clara.

"I like paddling about in the water, it's so nice," was the simple reply.

"Ay, you would like it in summer," cried Phil, "when the lilies are in flower, and the trees in leaf. But I know a little lady who in winter does not care to stir off the hearth-rug, and is ready to cry if sent out into the cold. She would not then care to be a swan, and paddle about on the ice."

"I'd rather be a swallow," cried Felix, "and escape altogether from winter with its frosts and its snows. A life of active pleasure, not of lazy enjoyment, for me! I like to travel and see distant lands and what fun it would be just to spread one's wings and be off for France, Italy, or Algiers, without any trouble of packing a trunk, with nothing heavier to carry than feathers, and no railway tickets to pay for, or bills at hotels on the way!"

"Were you a swallow, you'd have a bill wherever you flew," laughed Phil.

"Oh! A precious light one," said Felix gaily.

"As for me, I'd prefer the life of a lark," cried Phil. "I'd sooner mount high than fly far; and I'd like to whistle my song from the clouds. To my mind, the little sky-lark is the merriest bird under the sun."

"If you were to be changed into a bird, Sophy, what bird would you be?" asked Clara of a rather affected little girl, who sat twirling the bead bracelet which she wore on her arm.

Sophy drooped her head a little on one side, as if it rather troubled her to give an opinion,—and she thought herself too much of a fine lady to join in so childish a game. She glanced up, however, at the splendid rose which Clara held in her hand, and thinking that it would look very pretty in her own hair, prepared to answer the question.

"What bird would you be?" repeated the boys, who were growing a little impatient.

"The nightingale," said Sophy in an affected tone, again looking down, and twirling her beads.

"You must give your reason for your choice," observed Clara.

"Every one admires the nightingale's sweet notes," said Sophy, glancing up at the rose.

"Oh, ho! There's a fine reason!" laughed Phil. "I'd sing like the lark in the joy of my heart, with the sunshine about me; but Sophy would sing for other folk to admire her trills and her shakes, and cry out, 'I never heard anything so fine!'"

Sophy looked vexed at the remark, for Phil had hit on her weakness; the vanity which is always seeking for praise. Clara, who liked all to be peace and good-humour, turned at once the attention of the little party in another direction, by addressing Annie, the only one of the circle who had not yet been questioned.

"What bird would you be, dear?" asked she.

"I think, an eider-duck," replied Annie.

Her answer was received with a burst of laughter.

"A duck—to dabble in mud, and gobble up snails and frogs!" cried Phil.

"Or be gobbled up itself, with green pease, and admired as a very nice bird!" exclaimed Felix.

"Ducks are very pretty—almost as pretty as swans," lisped little Jessie, who did not like her sister to be laughed at.

"I do not think that eider-ducks are pretty," said Annie; "I did not choose the bird for its beauty."

"You have not given us a reason for your choice yet," observed Clara.

"I think the eider-ducks useful," said Annie; "the delightful quilt, so light yet so warm, which has been such a comfort to mamma in her illness, was made from their down. But my chief reason for liking the bird is its unselfishness. You remember, Jessie," added Annie, addressing her sister, "what mamma told us about the eider-ducks that are found in Scotland, Norway, and Iceland?"

"Oh yes; I know all about them!" cried Jessie. "The good mother duck pulls off the down from her own breast to line her nest, and make it soft and warm for her baby ducklings; and when people steal away the down, she pulls more and more, till she leaves herself bare,—and then her husband, the drake, gives his nice down to help her."

"When mamma told me all this," said Annie, "it reminded me of the beautiful story of the Highland mother who was overtaken by a terrible snowstorm, as she travelled with her babe in her arms. The mother stripped off her shawl, as the duck does her down, and wrapped it close—oh, so close!—round her child, and hid him in a cleft in a rock. The baby, wrapped in his mother's shawl, was found alive where she

had left him; but the poor woman—the loving woman—"Annie's voice failed her, and she did not finish the touching tale of the mother who perished in the cold from which she had guarded her child.

"Now let us compare the various reasons which have been given for choosing different birds," said Clara, "that we may decide upon which is the best one. The eagle was chosen for size and strength, the little hummingbird for beauty; one liked the swan's life of easy enjoyment, another the swallow's of active amusement. The lark was chosen for cheerfulness, the nightingale for the admiration which he gains, the eider-duck for the unselfishness which she shows. Now which of our little party has given the best reason for a choice?"

"Annie! Annie!" cried most of the children—though Sophy murmured something about "an ugly waddling creature that can say nothing but 'quack!'"

"Then I think that we agree that Annie has won the rose," said Clara.

And if, before the day was over, that sweet rose found its way to a chamber of sickness, and was laid on an eider-down quilt within reach of a lady's thin hand, the reader will easily guess how it came there. Annie was one not only to admire but to imitate the unselfishness of the bird that finds its pleasure in caring for the comfort of others, instead of seeking its own.

## ***The Hero and the Heroine.***

"HARRY was a hero, if ever there was one!" cried Theodore Vassy, after he had been for some time silently looking at a print of the prince who was afterwards so famous as Henry V. The print represented the well-known anecdote of Harry's trying on the crown of England by the sick-bed of his father.

"I never admire that story much," observed Theodore's eldest sister Alice, raising her eyes from a volume which she had been reading. "A son finds, as he thinks, that his father has just died; and, instead of bursting into tears (like our good Queen when she gained a throne by the death of her uncle), Prince Harry's first thought is to try on the crown! I do not wonder," added Alice with a smile, "that when the poor sick king woke from his deathlike sleep, he was little pleased with his son."

"But the son, if the story be true, made such a noble excuse for himself, that even his father was satisfied," said Theodore. "Harry had not tried on the crown because he was in the least hurry to wear it, but because—"

Alice shook her head, laughing. "Harry's excuses may have been clever, but I am afraid that they were but false ones," said she; "for when he was once on the throne, one crown was not enough for King Harry: he must carry sword and fire into poor France, because he wanted to have two!"

"Girls know nothing, understand nothing, about heroes," said Theodore in a tone of contempt.

"Girls have been heroines," replied Alice with some animation. "In this very book which I have been reading

—'Memorials of Agnes Jones'—there is an anecdote of her courage when she was a child of but eight years old which might have done credit to a boy of ten, even if he bore the name of Theodore Vassy," added the elder sister gaily.

Theodore prided himself on his manly spirit, though it was a spirit which more often carried him into difficulties than bore him bravely through them. For instance, Theodore had boasted that he would clear his father's cellar of the troublesome rats that had made it their home; and he had made an attempt to do so. The boy had even succeeded in catching a rat by the tail! But no sooner had the fierce little prisoner turned and bit his captor's finger, than Theodore, giving a cry of pain, had let the rat go, and had retreated at once from the cellar, leaving the honours of the battle-field to his small four footed foe.

Luckily for Theodore, no one had been present to witness the fight; and the boy took good care not to mention his adventure. Not even Alice knew where her brother had got the little mark left on his hand by the teeth of the rat.

"Let's hear your anecdote, if it's worth the hearing," said Theodore Vassy. "I never yet knew a girl who would not cry at the prick of a needle."

Alice turned back the pages of the book which she had been reading, till she came to the part relating to the childhood of Agnes Jones.

"This memoir is written by the sister of Agnes," observed Alice; "and it is one of the most beautiful books which I ever read in my life."

"And who was this Agnes?" asked Theodore.

"A young lady, the daughter of an officer," replied Alice Vassy. "When she was a little child, she accompanied her parents to the island of Mauritius, off the east coast of Africa, where occurred the following incident, thus related by her sister." And Alice read as follows:—

"At Mauritius, when she was about eight years old, a friend sent her a present of a young kangaroo from Australia. An enclosure was made for it in the garden, and Agnes delighted to feed and visit it daily."

"I've seen a kangaroo in the Zoological Gardens," interrupted Theodore. "It was larger than our big dog, and went springing and jumping on its long hind legs, as if it were set on springs. I never saw such a creature for leaping! I was told that the kangaroo has tremendous strength in those hind legs, and that, when hunted, it makes itself dangerous even to the dogs. I suppose that this little girl's kangaroo was very tame as well as young, or she might have had more pain than pleasure from her plaything." Theodore was thinking of his fight with the rat.

Alice went on reading the sister's account of the little Agnes and her pet kangaroo:—

"One day, as she opened the gate, it escaped, and bounded off into our neighbour's plantation. Agnes followed, fearing it might do mischief, climbed over the low wall which separated the two gardens, and after a long chase succeeded in capturing the fugitive. Some minutes afterwards my mother came into the garden, and was horror-struck to see her returning from the pursuit—the kangaroo, which she held bravely by its ears, struggling wildly for freedom, and tearing at her with its hind feet; while her dress was streaming with blood from the wounds inflicted by its nails."



"I say!" exclaimed Theodore involuntarily, "I'd have let the horrid beast go!"

"But she would not do so," continued Alice, still reading, "until she got it safely into its house; although it was many a long day before she lost the marks of her battle and its victory."

"She was a gallant little soul!" exclaimed Theodore. "What a pity it is that Agnes was a girl, and not a boy! For, after all, courage is not of much use to a woman."

"I am not sure of that," replied Alice; "nor, perhaps, would you think so, were you to read this beautiful Life. Agnes left a bright, happy home, to watch as a nurse by the sick-beds of the poor. Though she was a lady born and bred, she shrank from no drudgery, grumbled at no hardship: she worked hard, and she worked cheerfully, looking for no reward upon earth. Agnes had to struggle against great difficulties; but she mastered them just as she had mastered the kangaroo when she was a child."

"And got nothing by it," said Theodore Vassy. "One might suffer, and struggle, and conquer difficulties, if, like Harry the Fifth, one had a crown to make it worth while."

"There was a crown for Agnes," observed Alice gravely; "but not one that man could give, or that she could wear upon earth. The artist who drew that picture—" Alice glanced as she spoke at the print in the hand of her brother—"has made Prince Henry look upwards, as if praying to be made worthy to have a crown. Agnes Jones's was a life-long looking upwards—a life-long trying on, as it were, of the crown prepared for such as love their Heavenly King;—and I believe," added Alice, as she closed her volume, "that after

her brave struggles and her victories, Agnes Jones has gone to wear that crown."

## ***Beware of the Wolf.***

YOU never need fear, little children, to meet  
A wolf in the garden, the wood, or the street;  
Red Riding-hood's story is only a fable,—  
I'll give you its moral as well as I'm able:  
Bad Temper's the wolf which we meet everywhere—  
Beware of this wolf! Little children, beware!

I know of a boy, neither gentle nor wise,  
If you tell him a fault, he gives saucy replies;  
If kept from his way, in a fury he flies—  
Ah! Passion's the wolf with the very large eyes;  
'Tis ready to snap and to trample and tear—  
Beware of this wolf! Little children, beware!

I know of a girl always trying to learn  
About things with which she should have no concern:  
Such mean Curiosity really appears  
To me like the wolf with the very large ears,  
All pricked up to listen, each secret to share—  
Beware of this wolf! Little children, beware!

And Greediness, that's like the wolf in the wood  
With the very large mouth, ever prowling for food,  
That eats so much more than for health can be good;

That would clear a whole pastry-cook's shop if it could;  
That never a dainty to others will spare—  
Beware of this wolf! Little children, beware!

PASSION, PRYING, and GREEDINESS, each thus appears  
As a wolf with fierce eyes, a large mouth, or big ears;  
They bring to our nurseries fighting and fears,  
They cause bitter quarrelling, trouble, and tears.  
Oh! Chase them and cudgel them back to their lair—  
Beware of the wolves! Little children, beware!

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